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ABSTRACT

In March, 1965, seven hundred and seventy seven (i.e. almost two-thirds of the total) Minneapolis elementary school teachers completed a questionnaire expressing agreement or disagreement with each of 186 statements about disadvantaged children. The modal respondent was white, female, married, from the Midwest, of middle-class origins, of average age 40, recipient of a B.A. or B.S. degree, and with little or no experience with disadvantaged children. Samples of 200 teachers considered effective with low income children and 100 considered ineffective were selected. An analysis of responses suggests that the effective teacher, in contrast to the ineffective teacher, accepts the physical deprivation of the disadvantaged, recognizes racial and social discrimination, does not stereotype disadvantaged children, finds teaching the disadvantaged pleasant, accepts the liabilities of disadvantagement non-punitively, and accepts the existence of minority subcultures. Few background variables were related to these attitudes, and those relationships were slight. Most teachers indicate desire for improved training in teaching disadvantaged children. (JM)

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Teacher Attitudes Toward Culturally Disadvantaged Children

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In March 1965, Minneapolis elementary school teachers were asked to complete a lengthy questionnaire on "culturally disadvantaged" children. This questionnaire formed the basis for a study which attempted to answer three questions:

1. Do effective teachers of culturally disadvantaged pupils have attitudes toward the children which differ from attitudes of teachers who are not effective?

2. If so, how do these attitudes differ?

3. What are the characteristics of effective and not effective teachers of culturally disadvantaged children?

The words "culturally disadvantaged" were not defined since a secondary purpose of the study was to see if teachers responded to these words in a consistent fashion.

Almost two thirds, 777, of all elementary school teachers in the system completed the questionnaire. These teachers indicated their agreement or disagreement with each of 186 statements about disadvantaged children. For example, one statement said, "Disadvantaged children are really much happier than their middle- and upper-class peers". (Ninety-two per-cent of the responding teachers agreed to that statement). The statements covered fourteen subjects, with an approximately equal number of statements assigned to each subject. Subject categories were: communications, juvenile delinquency, teachers, health, mental ability, parents, physical surroundings, race, self-concept, work, teaching methods, physical appearance, peers and siblings, and "culture".

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Description of Responding Teachers

Teachers who responded to the questionnaire were predominantly female (86%), white (96%), married (58%), and from the midwestern region of the United States (91%). Their average age was forty. Most respondents had received B.A. or B.S. degrees, but 16% held advanced degrees, and approximately two per cent did not hold four year degrees. Over one-third of the responding teachers had received degrees during the five years preceding the study. About half were University of Minnesota graduates.

Self-description of family background indicated middle-class origins. Nine out of ten teachers claimed they came from upper-middle or lower-middle-class homes. Only seven per cent claimed they came from lower class families and only three per cent stated that their fathers had worked at unskilled labor occupations.

Many teachers claimed little or no experience with disadvantaged children. Although the typical teacher had more than thirteen years' teaching experience, she averaged less than five years' experience with disadvantaged children. Half the responding teachers claimed they had little or no experience with the culturally disadvantaged. One in three teachers said there were practically no disadvantaged children in her classroom and one out of five teachers stated that the majority of children in her class was disadvantaged.

Few responding teachers had received specific training for work with disadvantaged children. Ninety-one per cent felt they had not received adequate training for teaching disadvantaged children and 87% claimed they had never taken a course on the culturally deprived child. Less than half

the respondents had read one or more books on a list of six which included The Culturally Deprived Child, Slums and Suburbs, and The Other America.

Most teachers claimed that a child's cultural background made little difference to them, however, almost one-third (31%) stated a preference for teaching children who were not disadvantaged and about one-fifth (21%) preferred teaching disadvantaged children.

Attitudes of Effective and Not Effective Teachers of Disadvantaged Children

Samples of teachers considered particularly effective with low income children and teachers considered not effective with low income children were selected. Only teachers who had one or more year's experience with disadvantaged children were included. Selections were based on ratings of effectiveness made by fellow teachers, requests for transfer, file information indicating a particular desire to work in low income or high income schools, and the teacher's own feeling about working with low income children. Approximately 200 Effective teachers and 100 Not Effective teachers were identified.

Effective and Not Effective teachers differed significantly in their responses to many of the statements about disadvantaged children. Twenty-five statements which showed substantial differences in response were chosen for further study. An analysis of these items suggested six factors which differentiated the Effective from the Not Effective teacher of disadvantaged children.

Factor 1: Acceptance vs. Denial of Physical Deprivation: Effective teachers tended to accept the fact that disadvantaged children suffer from

certain physical and material deprivations which other children do not. Not Effective teachers were more likely to deny the existence of these deprivations. (The relative nature of these differences should be emphasized since the majority of teachers in the Not Effective sample as well as in the Effective sample recognized the existence of deprivation among certain children).

Factor 2-Equality vs. Discrimination: Effective teachers were more likely to state that disadvantaged youth have been discriminated against by society. Not Effective teachers leaned in the direction of believing that equal opportunity exists for all and that society has not been unfair to the disadvantaged or minority child.

Factor 3-Stereotyping vs. Restraint in Labelling: Teachers who are prone to stereotype children were more likely to be found in the Not Effective sample. Effective teachers tended to restrain from labelling, and to be suspicious of things, such as standardized tests, which might unfairly label a child.

Factor 4-Unpleasantness vs. Pleasantness of Teaching the Disadvantaged: Not Effective teachers were more likely to agree with statements such as, "Three years is a long stint of teaching the culturally disadvantaged" and, "It is only realistic to believe that teaching the culturally disadvantaged will be more unpleasant than teaching middle-class children." Again, the relative nature of these differences must be emphasized since the majority of teachers in both samples disagreed with these statements.

Factor 5-Punitive Denial vs. Non-Punitive Acceptance: This factor seems related to Factor 1, Denial of Physical Deprivation. However, there

is an additional element. In Factor 5, as in Factor 1, Not Effective teachers deny certain problems among the disadvantaged. Thus, children from disadvantaged homes are not more likely to have verbal problems or physical handicaps than middle class children. The denial of problems in Factor 5 is not limited to a denial of physical-material problems, but encompasses social and educational problems also.

The additional element is punishment! Children who exhibit symptoms of poverty should be punished since anyone can succeed in the United States if he really wants to.

Factor 6-Culture Denial vs. Acceptance of the Culture: Factor 6 is somewhat cloudy, but it seems to suggest another form of denial. This time there appears to be a denial of the existence of sub-cultures within our society-on the part of Not Effective teachers.

Three other factors were measured by the twenty-five items, but these did not separate Effective from Not Effective teachers. Factor 7 is worth noting; it is a sympathy factor. It contrasts sharply with Factor 5, which suggests empathy on the part of Effective teachers. In the sympathy factor there does not appear to be a recognition of the problems of the disadvantaged child on a realistic basis. While Factor 5 suggests an acceptance based on understanding, Factor 7 suggests a soft-heartedness. One is reminded of an overprotective mother who is blind to her child's faults.

The meaning of the six distinguishing factors may be made clearer by contrasting the views of a hypothetical Effective teacher with the views of a hypothetical Not Effective teacher.

The Effective teacher recognizes the existence of physical, material deprivation. She accepts the existence of a sub-culture of poverty as fact. She is willing to admit that there are special problems related to this sub-culture of poverty. She is willing to admit that there are special problems related to this subculture and to teaching children who are reared in the subculture. At the same time, she does not have a punitive view of the disadvantaged. The effective teacher restrains from labelling and from attributing problems of the disadvantaged to genetic or innate causes. She denies that teaching disadvantaged children is more unpleasant than teaching children from middle class homes. Finally, she tends to side with the disadvantaged against (some of) the traditional mores of society. She feels that equal opportunity does not exist for the culturally disadvantaged. To some extent, they are culturally disadvantaged because they have been discriminated against by the predominant society.

The teacher who is not effective in teaching disadvantaged children tends to reject the existence of material poverty. This is the Affluent Society! Children from disadvantaged homes are not more likely to have physical handicaps, to have difficulty with verbal expression, or to be delinquent. In fact, no such thing as a subculture of poverty exists. All Americans have equal opportunity for success. People who do not succeed are probably innately lazy or may have some other form of genetic deficiency. They should be punished for their deficiencies or lack of effort. The ineffective teacher recognizes and stereotypes the disadvantaged pupil. Such pupils she finds unpleasant to teach.

The major distinction between the effective and the ineffective teacher appears easily summarized. The effective teacher recognizes and accepts the problems of the disadvantaged without rejecting the people who have these problems. The ineffective teacher denies the existence of these problems, while at the same time, rejecting or punishing the people who exhibit symptoms of these problems. Put simply, the effective teacher is one who exhibits empathy; the ineffective teacher is one who lacks empathy, or is closeminded.

What are the characteristics of Effective and Not Effective teachers of culturally disadvantaged children?

First, let us look at some of the things which were studied which proved to be unrelated to attitudes toward disadvantaged children. Some of the results may surprise you. Age was not related to attitude, nor was sex and years of teaching experience. Years of experience with disadvantaged children were not related to attitudes toward disadvantaged children. No relationship was found between attitudes and marital status, region of the country in which the teacher was reared, teaching effectiveness in general (as determined by principals' ratings), father's occupation and education, degrees held, and courses taken on the topic of the disadvantaged child. University of Minnesota graduates, and graduates of other colleges did not differ substantially in attitudes toward disadvantaged children. And, with one exception, personality traits measured by the MMPI were similar for Effective and Not Effective teachers.

Few characteristics were related to attitudes and in all cases the relationship was slight. Negro teachers and teachers who claimed they came from low socioeconomic backgrounds tended to be more effective than white teachers and teachers who came from middle and upper class families. A slight superiority was shown by teachers who ranked high in their high school

class, and who scored high on the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory. Teachers who scored high on the Hy scale of the MMPI tended to be less effective (This scale may be interpreted as another form of denial of the existence of problems, i.e. "I refuse to admit that there is anything wrong with me"). Effective teachers were more likely to have read books about disadvantaged children, to have higher proportions of disadvantaged children in their classrooms, and to estimate that they had greater experience with disadvantaged children (although they did not claim that they had taught disadvantaged children for more years than Not Effective teachers). None of these characteristics were related to effectiveness strongly enough to be of practical use. They did suggest a picture of the effective teacher which may be useful in further research work.

What do teachers mean by "Culturally Disadvantaged"?

This study suggests that those teachers who are seen as effective are willing to take sides against a society which they feel has not treated disadvantaged children fairly. They believe that their pupils are culturally disadvantaged, not in the sense that they do not have a culture, or that their culture has no value, but in the sense that the dominant white, middle-class culture of the United States has <u>made</u> them disadvantaged. In the interpretation of the effective teacher, "culturally disadvantaged" is a verb, not a noun, nor an adjective. The culture of American society has disadvantaged these children. This disenfranchisement they see as unfair and they are willing to side with the children, against that culture.

For the teacher who is not effective with low income children, the problem of defining the term "culturally disadvantaged" is easily solved. Its existence is denied. "These children are no more disadvantaged than

anyone else. If they do not succeed, it is because they lack the will to achieve, the desire to get ahead. I was poor when I was a child, and look at me, etc. etc. . . ."

This study shows that teachers feel a great need for improved training in how to teach the disadvantaged child. Most teachers express a desire for such training, but the question is raised of how effective this training would be, for some teachers, if it did not zero in on the problem of basic attitudes toward culturally disadvantaged children.

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